

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 012748

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, TS

SUBJECT: BOURGUIBA VISIT AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE

REF: TUNIS 0065

1. TUNISIAN MINISTER OF PLAN AYARI MET WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON JANUARY 15 AND MADE PLUG FOR MORE ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE. (ECONOMIC QUESTIONS REPORTED SEPTEL.) HE STATED THAT BOURGUIBA FELT STRONGLY ABOUT THESE ISSUES AND WOULD RAISE THEM DURING PROSPECTIVE APRIL TRIP TO WASHINGTON.

2. NOTING HE CHARGED BY BOURGUIBA TO RAISE SECURITY MATTER, AYARI SAID THAT TUNISIA HAD NEVER HAD A SIGNIFICANT DEFENSE BUDGET AND WISHED TO CONTINUE PUTTING ITS OWN RESOURCES INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. GOT DOES NOT EXPECT TO MATCH MILITARY STRENGTH OF LIBYA OR ALGERIA BUT DOES PERCEIVE A THREAT REQUIRING CERTAIN EQUIPMENT. AYARI SAID THAT BOURGUIBA VERY PREOCCUPIED WITH PROBLEM. ON OTHER HAND,IT QUOTE OUT OF THE QUESTION END QUOTE FOR GOT TO FINANCE SUCH PURCHASES, SO IT HAS TURNED TO ITS FRIEND THE U.S.

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3. ATHERTON SAID WE HAD RECEIVED DETAILED REPORTS FROM

AMBASSADOR SEELYE ON HIS TALKS WITH TUNISIAN OFFICIALS, INCLUDING A FULL REPORT OF THE KINDS AND MAGNITUDES OF EQUIPMENT GOT BELIEVES IT REQUIRES. WE HAVE NOT YET HAD FULL OPPORTUNITY TO STUDY THE REQUEST, BUT ARE GIVING IT A VERY SERIOUS LOOK. IT APPEARS TO BE AN EXPENSIVE PROGRAM. ATHERTON SAID HE HAD INTENDED TO ASK WHAT THE GOT WAS PREPARED TO BUDGET TOWARD SUCH PURCHASES. WE WOULD ALSO BE INTERESTED IN KNOWING WHETHER TUNISIA WAS SEEKING FINANCIAL AID FROM ITS WEALTHIER ARAB FRIENDS.

4. AYARI RESPONDED THAT OUT OF AN OVERALL CAPITAL BUDGET OF 400 MILLION DOLS. FOR 1975, GOT WAS ALLOCATING ONLY 15 MILLION DOLS. FOR DEFENSE. IF DOUBLED, THAT WOULD ONLY BE 30 MILLION DOLS. TO SPEND EVEN MORE ON DEFENSE WOULD MEAN NEGLECTING SCHOOLS AND OTHER ECONOMIC/SOCIAL EXPENDITURES. AYARI SAID HE COULD NOT ADVISE HIS GOVERNMENT TO DO THAT. REGARDING OTHER ARAB SOURCES, AYARI SAID THAT GOT HAD APPROACHED UAE AND SAUDI ARABIA WITH NO RESPONSE YET RECEIVED. HE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THEIR RESPONSE WAS NEGATIVE. THOSE COUNTRIES ARE HELPING TUNISIA WITH ITS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUT HE DID NOT EXPECT THEM TO HELP TUNISIA BUY ARMS.

5. ATHERTON NOTED THAT CONGRESS WAS INCREASINGLY ECONOMY-MINDED REGARDING MILITARY ASSISTANCE. IT SCRUTINIZED GRANT PROGRAMS ESPECIALLY CLOSELY, BUT EVEN MILITARY CREDITS FOR ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS ARE CUT. THIS IS NOT A PROPITIOUS TIME, STATED ATHERTON, FOR NEW PROGRAMS OR FOR INCREASES IN ESTABLISHED ONES.

6. AYARI EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE BOURGUIBA TRIP TO WASHINGTON WILL MATERIALIZE FOR APRIL OR MAY. ATHERTON REPLIED THAT THE MATTER IS NOW WITH THE WHITE HOUSE WHERE THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM FOR THOSE MONTHS IS STILL BEING STAFFED OUT. KISSINGER

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